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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

TO : Refuge Manager, Upper Mississippi Refuge, Winona **DATE:** January 24, 1977

FROM : District Manager, Lansing District, Lansing, Iowa

SUBJECT: Annual Narrative Report - July 1 - December 31, 1975

General: Temperatures averaged much above normal with only three inches of snow in November and December. The first killing frost occurred on October 2, two weeks later than normal. Rainfall totaled 11.70 inches, compared to a normal of 16.11 inches. What rain that did fall came in heavy thundershowers, causing monthly river crests of one to two feet above normal through mid-September. During late September and October the pool level fell to much below normal. On September 27 a level of 19.30 (normal 20.00) was the lowest recorded in six years.

Low September and October water levels allowed most of the beaver flowages in the Reno bottoms to dry up. This allowed a late growth of millet and smartweed on the mudflats, but no seeds were produced. The pool remained ice free through December.

Construction and Maintenance: Only minor maintenance was carried out on the District, with the help of two CETA students and a Biological aid. Boat landings and sandbars were cleaned several times. Refuge signs were stained, painted, or replaced. Two cannon net sites were cleared for wood duck banding.

Habitat Management: None.

Wildlife: Three ospreys were seen regularly for the last ten days of August. Twenty-eight adult and six immature bald eagles were counted on November 17. The summer population of ducks consisted of 1,000 mallards, 10 blacks, 500 blue-winged teal, 2400 wood ducks, and 400 hooded mergansers. Production totaled 400 coot, 1,600 mallards, 20 blacks, 800 blue-winged teal, 6,400 wood ducks, and 400 hooded mergansers. Only wood ducks and hooded mergansers had changes from 1975, with wood ducks increasing by 600 and mergansers decreasing by 500. Increased brood size plus excellant brood cover from expanding lotus beds probably accounted for the wood duck increase. A smaller breeding population reduced merganser production.

Wood duck banding was successful, with six cannon net shots capturing 309 birds. Several hundred mallards were also captured but not banded.

Fall migrating blue-winged teal and widgeon arrived during the week of

Annual Narrative Report - Julyl - December 31, 1975

August 30, three weeks later than last year. The fall peak was 99,850 compared to 100,810 in 1974. Total days use for the September - December period was 3,391,360 compared to 3,976,490 in 1974.Fall canvasback use increased from 196,700 in 1974 to 821,800 in 1975.

Up to 500 geese and 100 swans used the pool during the fall migration, similar to last year.

Waterfowl hunting in Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota was very good, with Minnesota hunters averaging 3.21 birds/hunter on opening day. Most of the birds taken were blue-winged teal and wood ducks. Good flights of mallards were not seen during the entire season. Some canvasback shooting did develop late in the season, but luckily only a few hunters were out on the marshes.

The muskrat population remains low due to heavy trapping pressure and poor reproduction due to fluctuating water levels. Beaver populations continue to recover from the heavy trapping seasons of 1973&74. Information for furbearer trapping is included in the 1976 narrative.

Interpretation and Recreation: Presented two slide talks to 38 adults and 63 students. Because of the six month period, only hunting will be discussed under recreational use. Waterfowl hunting visits to the district totaled 10,630, the same as 1974. Although opening day use was down this year, open water extended the hunting season into December.

Other Items: Nothing to report.

Douglas M. Mullen

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District Manager

UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER WILDLIFE & FISH REFUGE

LANSING DISTRICT

LANSING, IOWA

ANNUAL NARRATIVE REPORT
Calendar Year 1976

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE REPORT

Fish and Wildlife Service

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Personnel

1. Douglas M. Mullen, Refuge Manager, GS-485-9, PFT.
2. Thomas W. Jennings, Biological Aid, GS-404-4
   6/21/76-9/10/76, T

Review and Approvals

Douglas M. Mullen 1/24/77
Submitted by Date

Area Office Date

Refuge

Regional Office Date

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I. GENERAL

A. Introduction

The Lansing District of the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife and Fish Refuge embodies government-owned lands in Navigation Pool 9. The acreage managed totals 40,948 divided between Minnesota (8,465 acres), Wisconsin (15,700 acres) and Iowa (16,783 acres), covering 33 river miles. Approximately 75% of the District refuge area is in Fish & Wildlife Service fee ownership, the remainder being Corps of Engineer lands managed for wildlife under a general plan and cooperative agreement.

B. Climatic and Habitat Conditions

Temperatures average much above normal for most of the year, with only January, May, October and December, having below normal temperatures. The first killing frost occurred on September 24, normal for the tri-state area.

Precipitation averaged above normal for the first five months of the year, totaling 14.70 inches compared to a normal of 10.24 inches. In early June one of the worst droughts in history began with only 7.59 inches of precipitation recorded for the rest of the year, compared to a normal of 21.32 inches. Lack of rainfall had little effect on upland plant growth due to abundant sub-soil moisture, but because the drought conditions also occurred in the upstream river watershed area, it had a substantial effect on the marsh areas of the unit. Normally, water levels on the river raise above normal two to three times a year, once in May with the snow melt, and again once or twice during the summer and fall due to heavy rains. During 1976, warm temperatures caused the first rise to occur in April, and the drought eliminated any additional fluctuations. River flow in August was the lowest in forty years with only 6,000 C.F.S. being discharged at L&D 9. The extreme low water occurred in 1933 (before the L&D system) with a flow of 3,300 C.F.S.

Response to the stable water levels by aquatics was significant. Submerged aquatics like pondweeds and coontail spread extensively in the open water areas of the pool. Lotas beds appeared in the Reno bottoms portion of the pool in areas where they have not occurred since the Locks and Dams were installed in the 1930's. Lack of rainfall allowed hundreds of acres of marshland to dry up in the northern half of the pool. The resulting mud flats developed extensive stands of millet, smartweed and nutgrass. However, lack of fall rains did not allow these areas to re-flood in the fall, making them unavailable for waterfowl use.

C. Land Acquisition

1. Fee Title

The fee title acquisition program for the Lansing District was completed in the 1930's.

2. Easements

None.

3. Other

None.

D. System Status

For 1976 the system status for the Lansing District will be discussed in the Winona office report.

1. Objectives

Nothing for the Lansing District to Report.

2. Funding

Nothing for the Lansing District to Report.

II. CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE

A. Construction

The Lansing District is considered to be in a nearly complete state of development as far as wildlife management is concerned. Additional development of recreational facilities will be done in cooperation with the Corps of Engineers and State agencies.

B. Maintenance

Only minor maintenance was carried out on the District, with the help of two CETA students and a Biological aid. Boat landings and sandbars were cleaned several times. Refuge signs were stained, painted or replaced. Two common net sites were cleared for wood duck banding.

C. Wildlife

None.

III. HABITAT MANAGEMENT

The Lansing District has no active habitat management programs at this time nor are any anticipated in the near future. Water levels are controlled by the Corps of Engineers through the Locks and Dams for commercial navigation only. Fish and wildlife benefits are incidental to water level minipulation for this navigation. Bottomland hardwoods interspersed with marshes and sloughs provide abundant wildlife food and cover.

A. Croplands

None.

B. Grasslands

No management.

C. Wetlands

No management.

D. Forestlands

No management.

E. Other Habitat

No management.

F. Wilderness and Special Areas

Two areas within the Lansing District are presently being considered for inclusion in the Wilderness system. These are the Reno bottoms, located in Minnesota immediately south of L&D 8, and the Winneshiek bottoms, located in Wisconsin across the main channel from Lansing, Iowa. Hearings are expected in early 1977 and a final decision by the end of the year.

G. Easements for Waterfowl Management

None.

IV. WILDLIFE

A. Endangered and/or Threatened Species

Ospreys: Seven ospreys were counted near New Albin landing on August 31. From five to ten ospreys are counted on the district each spring & fall during migration. None nest on the area.

Bald Eagles: Eagle numbers continue high with a spring peak of 100 and a fall peak of 150 birds estimated, compared to 70 and 100 during 1975. The number of young eagles appears to be increasing each year. Spring and fall peak populations of eagles appear to vary with weather and ice conditions and are not a reliable index of population trends.

The Reno bottoms pair of Bald Eagles raised only one young in 1976, compared to three in 1975. Total young since the nest was discovered in 1969 now stands at twelve eaglets.

B. Migratory Birds

1. Waterfowl

Ducks: Up to 200 semi-domestic ducks remain on the District each January and February, wintering in the open water areas below the Lansing power plant. By the first of March, mallards, ring-necks, goldeneyes, buffleheads, and mergansers were returning to the unit. The spring peak of 60,050 ducks occurred on April 24, one week later and 10,000 birds higher than last year. Lower spring flood levels and an abundant food supply probably accounted for the increase.

Wood duck spring flight counts have been conducted at three different stations since 1973 to determine the district breeding population. The counts are conducted from the middle of April through the first week in May. The breeding population for 1976 was calculated at 1,898, nearly 400 birds down from last year. A heavy harvest of wood ducks during the 1975 hunting season is believed to have caused this decrease. Numbers of wood ducks counted at stations were:

	1963	1973	1974	1975	1976
Crooked Creek	84	90	104	87	63
Village Creek	26	172	170	173	147
Wexford Creek	50	72	90	106	83

Normal water levels in May and throughout the summer created excellent nesting habitat, with twice as many mallards and four times as many blue-winged teal stopping to nest. Birds nesting included 2,000 mallards, 10 blacks, 2,000 blue-winged teal, 1,900 wood ducks, and 500 hooded mergansers. Constant water levels also allowed for excellent brood survival, with the following birds produced to flight stage:

	1973	1974	1975	1976
Mallard	1,000	1,600	1,600	5,600
Blacks	20	20	20	20
Wood Duck	6,100	5,800	6,400	6,100
Blue-winged Teal	700	800	800	5,600
Hooded Merganser	400	900	400	1,100

Wood duck banding was done entirely with the common-net again this year. Only one site was needed. Two shots were made capturing 202 birds. The wood ducks banded included:

	AHY	HY	TOTAL
Male	4	82	86
Female	11	105	116
	15	187	202

Fall migrating blue-winged teal first arrived on the district during the week of August 30. This was two weeks later than 1975. Peak waterfowl use occurred during the week of October 30, totaling 105,200. This was 6,900 above last year. Total fall use days increased 6% to 4,213,580. Canvasback use of the pool continues to increase, with 939,400 use days recorded in 1976 compared to 821,800 in 1975. The peak population increased from 30,000 in 1975 to 38,000 this year.

Geese: Canada geese and snow geese make only minor use of Pool 9, stopping omly a few days at New Albin and Lansing Big Lakes. A peak of 1,000 Canada geese stopped at Lansing Big Lake on April 3.

Swans: Whistling swan use of the Pool usually is very minor, with only 10 to 20 using the area in the spring. In 1976, however, 300 swans were counted in the Harpers Slough closed area on November 20.

Coots: Coots peaked at 18,000 during the spring and 60,000 during the fall. The 1975 peaks were 9,000 and 60,000 respectively. The breeding population was 400 and production was 500. The 1975 production was 300.

Waterfowl census and production estimates are done in accordance with the District Wildlife Inventory Plan. Sample counts are made weekly and brood routes are run twice each year. Information is accurate enough to signify trends.

2. Marsh and Water Birds

Egrets, Herons and Bitterns: Great egrets and great blue herons nest in one large rookery in the Reno Bottoms near Genoa, Wisconsin. Nesting surveys are run on the numbered nest trees each year. The peak population of great egrets was 600 with 400 young produced. Great blue herons peaked at 1900 and produced 700 young. In 1975, egrets peaked at 800 and produced 400 young. Great blue herons peaked at 2,100 and produced 900 young. A severe thunderstorm with high winds and hail hit the rookery at the peak of the nesting season in 1976, destroying many nests and young. Green heron nests are scattered throughout the district, with a peak of 800 birds producing 400 young. Black and yellow-crowned night herons, plus American and least bitterns are present in small numbers and nest in the district.

3. Shorebirds, Gulls, Terns and Allied Species

Nothing to Report.

4. Raptors

Nothing to Report.

5. Other Migratory Birds

Nothing to Report.

C. Mammals and Non-Migratory Birds and Others

1. Game Mammals

White-tailed deer: Low water levels and heavy annual plant growth provided excellent food and cover for deer on the district. An estimated 100 deer used the area during the spring and winter, moving off the refuge during the summer and fall to feed in the corn fields. Hunting success was low because of the thick cover.

2. Other Mammals

Muskrats: The muskrat population is determined from house counts on 16 survey areas throughout the district. There were 1,237 houses counted in 1976 compared to only 637 in 1975. An addition, low water levels allow many muskrats to build bank dens, so the population is estimated as more than twice as high as 1975. Low water levels with no fluctuations caused ideal breeding habitat for muskrats in 1976.

Beaver: The beaver house count gave 49 active lodges on three transect routes, compared to 15 in 1975. Light trapping pressure continues to allow a build up in the beaver population. Low water levels in the Reno bottoms forced many

beaver to move south into Iowa and Wisconsin this fall.

3. Resident Birds

Wild Turkey: Birds continue to spread from the Reno, Minnesota stocking site, as well as Iowa stockings between Lansing and New Albin. More than 200 continue to use the refuge bottoms during the fall, winter, and spring months.

4. Other Animal Life

Fish: Summer and fall sport fishing was excellent with large catches of bullheads, bass, bluegills, croppie, and walleye common, especially in the Lansing area of the pool. Ice fishing was also good. Low water levels concentrated the fish and allowed for large commercial fishing hauls.

V. INTERPRETATION AND RECREATION

A. Information and Interpretation

1. On-Refuge

Little or no interpretation has been attempted on the Lansing district because of the unrestricted public access and the one man staffing. With completion of the sign plan, efforts will be made to improve interpretation at access points. Refuge leaflets are available at the headquarters at Lansing. Rookery tours were given to 10 students from South Winneshiek High School and 15 students from Luther College in Decorah.

2. Off-Refuge

Presented 5 slide or film talks to 157 students and adults in towns surrounding the refuge.

District Manager Mullen remained active in the New Albin Community Club, the Lansing Lions Club, and the Lansing Lions Volunteer Ambulance.

B. Recreation

1. Wildlife Oriented

Fishing: Fishing visits for the year totaled 136,000, up 5,000 from 1975. Better weather, plus stable water conditions probably accounted for the increase.

Hunting: Deer hunters made an estimated 820 visits to the refuge, compared to 850 during 1975. More deer on the bottoms attracted more hunters, but success was poor due to heavy annual plant growth.

no turkey hunting?
not for 2 or 3 more years.

Waterfowl hunting visits increased from 10,630 in 1975 to 11,330 in 1976, probably due to the lack of water in the inland marshes. Wisconsin and Iowa waterfowl hunters had only fair success on their first opening of a split season, averaging less than 2 birds per hunter. Minnesota hunters had a very poor opening and season in the Reno bottoms as most marsh and slough areas were dry. Iowas second opening on October 23rd. could only be rated as excellent. Large numbers of mallards, widgeon and teal moved into the pool on the 21st. providing excellent shooting. Most hunters limited out with the average at nearly 4 birds per hunter. Hunting remained excellent in Iowa and Wisconsin through November 10.

The refuge was closed to canvasback hunting again in 1976. Although canvasback populations were high during the hunting season, few hunters were present when these birds were flying. Most late season hunters reported that the only birds that they could get to decoy were canvasback.

Trapping:

Fur Catch 1975-1976

Species	No Reports	Catch	Value	Pelt Averages
Muskrats	154	12,905	$41,155.75	$ 3.19
Mink	15	30	$ 361.00	$12.03
Beaver	15	85	$ 969.00	$11.40
Raccoon	10	56	$ 661.00	$11.80

One hundred and sixty-three trappers bought permits in this district during the 1975-1976 season. This was 43 less than last year, even though prices were up. Many wives and kids decided not to trap this year after finding out just how hard it was in 1974-1975. The total muskrat catch continues to drop, with 33,391 reported in 1973-1974, 27,705 in 1974-1975, and only 12,905 this year. High water fluctuations plus heavy trapping pressure is believed to be the cause for the decrease. Muskrat prices increased by fifty-two cents a pelt.

2. Non-Wildlife Oriented

Recreation- Non-Wildlife Use, including camping, picnicing, swimming, boating, and waterskiing totaled 66200 visits during 1976, down 1,600 from last year. Although weather conditions

appeared ideal for this type of recreation, apparently people stayed away from the river this year, maybe because of the bi-centennial celebrations.

C. Enforcement

Waterfowl hunting enforcement was extremely difficult again this year because of the point system. It is nearly impossible to observe hunters in the blinds to determine points taken. Reordering at the landings eliminates nearly all over the limit cases. Only two early shooting cases were made in 1976.

The Jackson Island illegal fill case finally came to trial on March 15, after nearly three years of legal delays. The case was brought to the attention of the Corps of Engineers and the Fish and Wildlife Service by Larry Moore, Iowa Water Patrol Officer. During the late 1940's, a cut formed through private land into the Jackson Island lake area. By the late 1960's the cut had widened to nearly 100 feet, providing year-round access to the lake, owned partly by the Fish & Wildlife Service. During the fall of 1973, the private owners of the cut attempted to build a dam across the area to restrict access to the lake and to reclaim their land. In the ensuing court case, the Corps of Engineers and the Fish & Wildlife Service successful argued that the cut was navigable and could not be closed. The private landowners are appealing this decision.

VI. OTHER ITEMS

A. Field Investigations

Nothing to Report.

B. Cooperative Programs

Cooperation with GREAT (Great Environmental Action Team) was continued in 1976. District manager's acted as coordinators for the on-site dredging inspections. This year the Corps of Engineers was required to justify their areas for dredging. Because of opposition from the states and the refuge, only an area was dredged in the pool during 1976. This was an unjustified "straightening" of the channel near twin island at the mouth of the Bad Axe River. After this one project, state opposition prevented any further unnecessary dredging.

C. Items of Interest

On August 12, Dairyland Power's application to run at 161 KV powerline across the river at Lansing, Iowa was discussed at a public hearing at the Lansing high school. Two proposals for a river crossing had been considered by Dairyland, one at Lansing and one to cross at Reno, then south to Lansing. Dairyland contended that they needed to connect their plant at Genoa, Wisconsin to the

new Interstate plant at Lansing to gain sufficent power to supply LaCrosse, Wisconsin in emergincies. In their preliminary assessment Dairyland rejected the Reno crossing as too long and too costly. By the meeting night opposition to the Lansing crossing was very strong, with several Senators and representations, as well as all state and local environmental groups calling for a full environmental impact statement. Over 600 people attended the meeting, and nearly all were much opposed to the Lansing crossing, suggesting that the line cross at Reno or be buried. Nearly 100 people stayed until the meeting was closed at 1:15 a.m. Because of this opposition both the Corps of Engineers and the Fish and Wildlife Service has asked for a full environmental impact statement .

D. Safety

All safety literature was reviewed as it was received and the refuge staff meetings included safety discussions and films. District personnel recorded no accidents during 1976. In early November, three Wisconsin waterfowl hunters drowned while trying to reach Ferryville during a wind storm. Their twelve foot boat overturned in the middle of Lake Winneshiek. Only two bodies have been recovered to date.